

One Who Had Broken the Law and Sought Escape Could Not Evade a Duty to His Pursuers.

THE WAY TO FREEDOM

BY PERCIVAL WILDE.

THE two men had little in common. Maynard gave the impression of being a prosperous business man, Guthrie of an underpaid subordinate in his employ.

Maynard's features, mobile, expressive, clean-cut, radiated intelligence—and the habit of command. The deeply lined lines around Guthrie's mouth, the mild blue eyes, betokened stolidity, perhaps, and a lifetime spent in taking orders.

Yet when Maynard spoke he addressed his remarks to "Mr. Guthrie"; and when Guthrie replied he did not accord Maynard the dignity of a prefix. Stranger yet, the two were dining together, dining in a crowsy room attached to a fifth-class restaurant, and Guthrie had ordered for both while Moody stared in moody silence.

The waiter pushed his way out through the battered door and returned an instant later with a fleet of chipped china dishes, which he proceeded to deal out impartially. Then he left the oddly assorted pair alone.

Maynard examined the lukewarm viands with disapproval.

"I don't think I can eat anything," Guthrie smiled. Sixty years of over-flowing life had taught him patience; and long experience with men in Maynard's position had made him indulgent. Maynard had most excellent reasons for being dissatisfied.

An hour ago he had been free, with every prospect of indefinitely continued liberty. Then, walking around a corner, spinning golden day dreams, he had marched straight into the arms of the one man he had seemed least likely to meet—and most dreaded meeting.

He should have foreseen it, groaned Maynard, as he watched Guthrie helping himself liberally. For five long months, posing as an invalid, he had not stirred from the obscure boarding house in which he had taken refuge at the end of his solitary flight. He might well have endured five months more and have made himself secure beyond peradventure. The weather was to blame. The golden sunlight, the scented spring breezes, the shouts of romping children—all these had called to something deep below the surface, for Maynard was a young man. The chances of his being recognized here, 500 miles from home, were remote.

According to the laws of probability, Maynard should never have been caught. And yet now he was breaking bread with the man who was punitively to take him back for punishment.

"No wonder he kicks about the food," reflected Guthrie, and continued aloud between mouthfuls: "We'll get a better dinner than this when we get on the train."

"You're commenting Maynard ungraciously," he started tonight.

"This afternoon," corrected Guthrie. "We leave on the 4 o'clock."

Maynard cast an appraising glance at his captor. Over sixty, tall, powerfully built, Guthrie would have presented no inconsiderable obstacle twenty years ago—even ten years ago. But age had weakened him; time had whittled down the sturdy muscles. The man who had captured Maynard was nothing but a shell of what he had once been, an antagonist hardly to be reckoned with seriously.

Violence itself Maynard dreaded. But with his freedom at stake he would stop at nothing. There would be alone an afternoon and a night, perhaps longer. Surely within that time an opportunity would present itself. Maynard would be quick to seize it.

Impersonally he compared his own physique with that of his captor. On the score of weight he was at a good fifty pounds disadvantage; but Guthrie's once gigantic muscles were flabby. He himself was in the pink of condition.

He smiled contemptuously. It was characteristic of him that he gave not the least thought to the weapons which Guthrie certainly carried. He would choose a time when his captor would have to rely on his bare hands alone. He fell upon his meal with a better appetite.

Guthrie smiled.

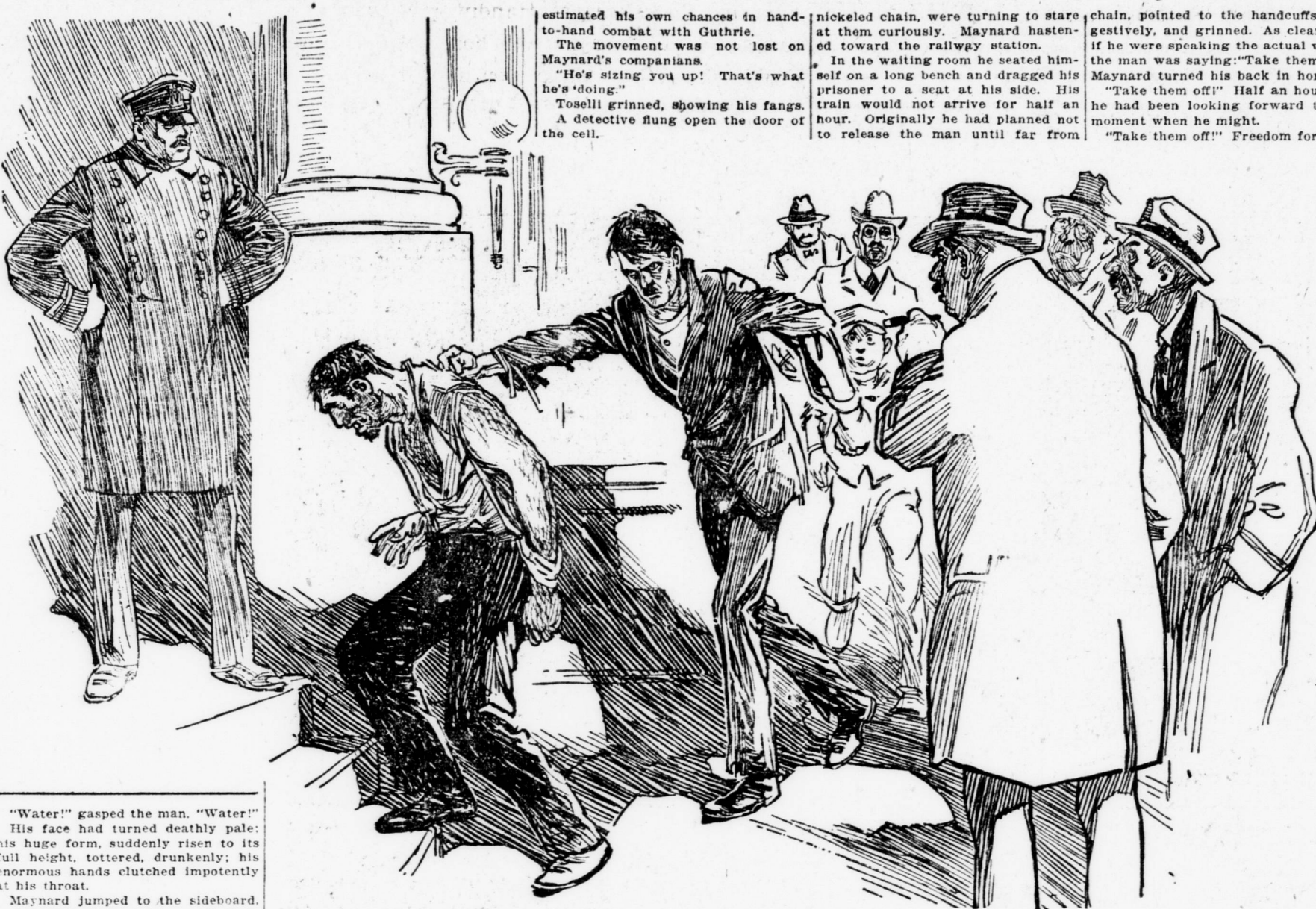
"That's right; make the best of it. You can never tell—you may be lucky when you get into court. The judge may let you off easy."

Court! Judge! Those two factors had had no place in his calculations. Maynard would never be caught; that he had decided on the night that he had impulsively planned the crime. It could be done; it could be done safely, if cleverly enough. Cleverly! That thought had been his damnation. Had it been merely a question of lawbreaking, his instincts would never have permitted him to go wrong. But it had been a question of matching his wits against the wits of the creditors who would descend upon him in a swarm were they to get an inkling of the truth. And it had seemed, in those distant days, that his life might pass without detection. Business was sure to get better. The bank, and the thin-lipped examiner who had checked his account, would never know how near he had been to destruction.

And then, somehow, business had failed to get better. Collections were bad; checks were not coming in. Yet he was compelled to settle his own accounts promptly; any other course would have involved fatal admissions. Slowly, relentlessly, inevitably, Maynard saw his downfall approaching. His principal competitor had given up the fight, had thrown himself on the mercy of his creditors, and was to be tied over. Bitterly Maynard reflected that he had not been so unnecessarily clever, he might have done the same thing. But his signature on the false statement had been beyond the pale; for him there would be no assistance, nothing but a swift trial, disgrace and years in prison.

With characteristic calm he had turned his intelligence upon that latter subject. After the exposure, could he escape punishment? He had thought so until he had walked into Guthrie's arms. Now, after having made sure of the weakness of his captor, he felt confident of it.

A harsh, raucous sound from Guthrie broke in on Maynard's ruminations.



A CURIOUS PROCESSION MOVED UP THE PRINCIPAL STREET OF MADISON.

"Water!" gasped the man. "Water!"

His face had turned deathly pale; his huge form, suddenly risen to its full height, tottered drunkenly; his enormous hands clutched impotently at his throat.

Maynard jumped to the sideboard, and brought him a glass. Guthrie tried to drink.

"Heart's bad," he whispered as his prisoner, too surprised to profit by his sudden advantage, eased him into a chair. "Some day—doctor told me—it's going to quit ticking—like a busted watch."

Somehow Maynard found himself overtopping with sympathy for his full enemy. He torn open the man's collar; flung up a rickety window.

"I'm going for a doctor!" he heard himself saying.

But before the words had passed his lips he realized their futility. Guthrie had slumped to the floor, his arms spread wide, his head cocked at an impossible angle; and even as Maynard hesitated, the labored breathing ceased.

Guthrie was dead.

Had it been possible to hip Guthrie Maynard would have helped him, even at the cost of his own freedom; of that he was conscious, with a curious thrill. He had planned to fight the man, to injure him, if need be, with what consequences might follow. A higher power had taken the matter out of his hands, had struck more forcibly than ever he would have dared strike.

Flight, was out of the question. They had been seen to enter the restaurant together. Were he to leave alone, a minute would elapse before the beginning of the pursuit. Were he to run away, Guthrie's death would be laid at his door, and no amount of explanation could save him from this graver charge. Flight meant confession—a confession of anything and everything.

But if he remained his position would be hardly better. His version of the story might be accepted until an examination of the dead man's effects showed him to be an officer of the law and further investigation disclosed Maynard as a fugitive from justice. He was guilty of one crime; the law would hold him capable of any other.

THE door opened suddenly. He wheeled. It was the waiter bringing their coffee. On the instant Maynard's resolution was taken.

"See!" he commanded gruffly, and slammed the door in the waiter's face.

He smiled as the footsteps died out along the uncarpeted corridor. The solution, the logical solution, had come to him as in a flash of lightning. Five hundred miles from home, Guthrie might be as unknown here as Maynard himself.

Swiftly he bent over the dead man, and emptied his pockets. Swiftly he exchanged their contents with his own. He sighed with satisfaction as in a trouser pocket he found the object he most sought, the little gold shield which identified the bearer.

Hardly had he finished when the door burst open.

Maynard exhibited the shield with a composure which he was far from feeling.

"I'm Guthrie, from Madison," he explained. "I arrested this man an hour ago. 'He's dropped dead.'"

The police nodded as calmly as if prisoners were in the habit of dropping dead every hour.

"Arrested him here?" he asked.

"Yes," said Maynard, "bumped into him on the street. Wasn't looking for him, but recognized him. He's wanted back home."

The officer scanned the dead man's face curiously. "No spring chicken, is he? Guess he's given the police enough trouble in his time."

Somehow Maynard felt unable to join in the libel.

The police officer turned to him with interest.

"So you're Guthrie? We've been expecting you. He's a hard case. He thought it best to answer with a noncommittal, 'Yes?'"

The officer nodded.

"We've got the can safe under lock and key, waiting for you to come with the warrant. And I don't mind saying, 'he added emphatically, 'that we'll be mighty glad to get rid of him. We've had some tough customers in this little town, but not many to touch this bird.'"

Maynard pulled out the sheaf of papers which he had removed from the detective's pocket, and leafed through it with elaborate nonchal-

lance. A large, official-looking envelope seemed promising. He opened it.

"That's right," said the police officer, taking the single document it contained from his hands. "Original warrant of extradition. You can't serve it any too soon to suit us."

Nothing remained for Maynard, the impostor, but to play the role through to the finish. He would accept custody of the man, and escort him out of the city. Once safe from pursuit, he would turn him loose, and resume his own interrupted flight.

A sudden thought came to him before he left the room. Guthrie had not quailed at the thought of guarding not one, but two abode-bodied prisoners during a five-hundred mile trip.

A wholly involuntary phrase of admiration for the lion-hearted dead man came to his lips: "By George, he certainly had nerve!"

The police officer caught his glance and smiled.

"Wait till you see Toselli," he suggested. "You'll need still more of it!"

MAYNARD'S story was accepted without suspicion. The dead man, he explained to the local authorities, was one Maynard, a fugitive from justice. He gave cautious details. It had been a matter of juggling books; now the man had gone where such books as were kept might not be jugged with. The account was closed.

And while his lips formed the words, his intelligence made careful note that Maynard, the fugitive, was now officially dead and the pursuit at an end. Tomorrow the man who passed for Guthrie would disappear, as also would the prisoner who had been confined to his keeping. The authorities would perhaps admit their unwisdom in having sent an old man upon so dangerous a mission. The prisoner, if recaptured subsequently, would be charged with an additional crime. But the Maynard case would be closed once and for all.

The men at headquarters led him to a small whitewashed cell.

"This," they explained, "is Toselli." Maynard peered through the bars and saw a short, squat body, arms

tries to get away don't take a chance—shoot!"

Maynard smiled. The prisoner would get away, and there would be no shooting.

THEY were crossing the street. He looked up to see a heavily loaded truck bearing down upon him. He moved in his prisoner's direction to escape it and felt the arm to which he had handcuffed his own suddenly turn to steel and thrust him violently into the path of the crushing danger. With a gasp he flung his weight on the prisoner, carried him bodily off his feet and gained the safety of the sidewalk by a fraction of a second.

"You swine! You unutterable swine!" he cried.

Toselli looked up at him silently and grinned.

If he could only rid himself of his dangerous charge, turn the man loose! For the time being it was out of the question. Street urinals, spying the handcuffs, were accompanying him in chattering groups. Pedestrians, catching the glint of the

estimated his own chances in hand-to-hand combat with Guthrie. The movement was not lost on Maynard's companions.

"He's stinging you up! That's what he's doing," Toselli grinned, showing his fangs. A detective flung open the door of the cell.

nicked chain, were turning to stare at them curiously. Maynard hastened toward the railway station.

In the waiting room he seated himself on a long bench and dragged his prisoner to a seat at his side. His train would not arrive for half an hour. Originally he had planned not to release the man until far from

chain, pointed to the handcuffs suggestively, and grinned. As clearly as if he were speaking the actual words, the man was saying: "Take them off!"

Maynard turned his back in horror. "Take them off!" Half an hour ago he had been looking forward to the moment when he might.

"Take them off!" Freedom for him!

He could overhear some of their remarks. "See, they're handcuffed together!" "He's a murderer. The man said so."

"Wonder what he'd do if he got loose!"

An engaging flapper, towing an anxious father, surveyed them with interest.

"Which one's the murderer?" she inquired.

Maynard might have laughed had not been the precise question he had been asking himself. Oddly enough, he could see nothing humorous in it.

The flapper, having been duly enlightened by her parent, favored captor and captive alike with a radiant smile and tripped on. The father, passing Maynard, nodded to him affably. Curious, he reflected, how all his fellow passengers had suddenly come to regard him as a friend! He was conscious of no reciprocal sentiment. By the merest chance the handcuffs were fastened to his left wrist instead of to his right. Had Guthrie lived, things would have been otherwise. Guthrie, physical enemy, could have been outwitted—but now that something deep in Maynard's soul questioned and questioned and would not be satisfied.

He fell to counting the mileposts as they flashed by. With each his security lessened. With each the probability that he would be recognized by some passenger increased. Quite impersonally he began to wonder just when that would happen.

Darkness fell. The train rushed on.

They spent the night sitting bolt upright in the day coach. Guthrie would have taken a prisoner into the dining car for an evening meal. Maynard dismissed the thought. The opportunity for escape while crossing the swaying platforms was too obvious. A sudden push, an overwhelming strain on the slender limbs which bound them together and freedom! Such an accident would take the responsibility from his shoulders, but not if he could foresee the accident.

During the night the coach gradually emptied. At each stop sleepy passengers nodded farewell to Maynard and disembarked. Morning came as the train neared their destination and, but for a few scattered travelers dozing in distant seats, Maynard and his companion had the car to themselves.

It was then that Toselli spoke. He leaned toward Maynard and hissed the words into his ear:

"You—no Guthrie!"

Maynard was too weary to feel surprised.

Toselli grinned.

"Then why you say you Guthrie, eh?"

Maynard's thoughts went crashing back to the scene at the jail. The detective had addressed him by the name of the dead man. Toselli had started. He had not noticed it then.

He waited for the man to continue.

"Guthrie—he arres me—five years ago. I know Guthrie."

"Well, what of that?" Maynard heard himself saying.

The man leered into his eyes. "Mebbe you kill Guthrie, what?"

He waited for the man to continue.

"Guthrie—he arres me—five years ago. I know Guthrie."

"Well, what of that?" Maynard heard himself saying.

The man leered into his eyes. "Mebbe you kill Guthrie, what?"

He waited for the man to continue.

"Guthrie—he arres me—five years ago. I know Guthrie."

"Well, what of that?" Maynard heard himself saying.

The man leered into his eyes. "Mebbe you kill Guthrie, what?"

He waited for the man to continue.

"Guthrie—he arres me—five years ago. I know Guthrie."

"Well, what of that?" Maynard heard himself saying.

The man leered into his eyes. "Mebbe you kill Guthrie, what?"

He waited for the man to continue.

"Guthrie—he arres me—five years ago. I know Guthrie."

"Well, what of that?" Maynard heard himself saying.

The man leered into his eyes. "Mebbe you kill Guthrie, what?"

He waited for the man to continue.

"Guthrie—he arres me—five years ago. I know Guthrie."

"Well, what of that?" Maynard heard himself saying.

The man leered into his eyes. "Mebbe you kill Guthrie, what?"

He waited for the man to continue.

"Guthrie—he arres me—five years ago. I know Guthrie."

"Well, what of that?" Maynard heard himself saying.

The man leered into his eyes. "Mebbe you kill Guthrie, what?"

He waited for the man to continue.

"Guthrie—he arres me—five years ago. I know Guthrie."

self, of course, but freedom, too, for the monster. Across the aisle unsuspecting passengers were settling themselves comfortably. Humanity! And the thing shackled to his wrist was but biding its time to prey upon it!

For the law itself Maynard felt contempt. He had broken it. But for those simpler laws which went down into the origin of man's being, the laws which proclaimed: "Thou shalt not kill!" He was conscious of intuitive respect. He had never thought much about them. It had never occurred to him that he might one day be brought into conflict with them.

Yet change had placed it in his power to kill just as surely as if his own hand wielded the weapon. If he liberated the thing that tugged suggestively at his wrist, and if the inevitable happened, would he not be equally guilty? Would he not be more guilty? His was the intelligence to foresee. Would not the responsibility be his?

The train was carrying him back to the place from which he had fled. It was reducing at the rate of forty to fifty miles an hour the precious miles between himself and his pursuers. Chance had undone the nearly fatal consequences of his first blunder; was he to blunder a second time?

"No!" breathed Maynard. "No!"

He must accomplish the impossible, the prisoner must be delivered to the authorities and he must make good his own escape.

But it suddenly came to Maynard that his prisoner might be as quick-witted as himself. He glanced into the crazy eyes. The look that he received in return was almost friendly.

As the train slowed down and slithered to a halt at a station Toselli rose nonchalantly, and jerked his head in eloquent suggestion that they alight here. With a violence of which he would have thought himself incapable, Maynard leaped at his prisoner.

Had the man read his thoughts? Here Maynard had hoped the two might leave the train; here, undisturbed by prying eyes, he had hoped to turn the key in the lock. Yet, a single glance through the window at the pretty little cottages, the orderly white street, had told him unmistakably that it was for him to say whether tragedy and death were to be loosed upon the unsuspecting community. Liberty, absence of restraint, the right to come and go as one pleased—what was it all worth if it meant that he could never again take up a newspaper without dread- ing the news it might bring him? From his human pursuers he might make himself secure; but the news of the revolting deed for which he might make himself responsible would pursue him to the very end of the world!

His prisoner sat hunched together at his side, drilling him through with malignant eyes. He had not spoken his mind. Here was bewilderment turned to suspicion, and suspicion turned again to suspicion, and suspicion swollen into soul-scorching, soul-blistering hate.

The momentary struggle between the men had attracted the attention of other passengers. As the train started, an inquisitive traveling salesman rose and came nearer to inspect the prisoner.

"What's he done?" he asked, genially.

"Murder," answered Maynard, shortly. The traveling salesman moved away abruptly.

Maynard, watching out of the corner of his eye, saw him imparting his knowledge to other passengers.

"No, there's no danger," he could hear him saying; "he's got him handcuffed."

Quite unconsciously Maynard squared his shoulders. Maynard, the fugitive from society's justice, became Maynard, the protector of society!

PRESENTLY nervous travelers in groups of two and three, found pretext to wander to his end of the car, there to favor the two men with an impartial scrutiny.

WHEN he had taken their seats in the train, Toselli shook the

city. Now he desired nothing so much as to be relieved of his unwelcome companion at once.

He, Maynard, was a criminal. The law which he had violated proclaimed him one. The other man was a criminal, too, and Maynard became conscious of acute resentment at a classification broad enough to include them both. Alike fugitives from justice they should have had much in common. The thought flitted through Maynard's mind, and left behind it nothing but a sense of revolt. He would have reached for the key of the handcuffs at once had not the station been too crowded.

What had the man done? The papers which he had removed from Guthrie's pockets would tell the story. He leaped through them.

self, of course, but freedom, too, for the monster. Across the aisle unsuspecting passengers were settling themselves comfortably. Humanity! And the thing shackled to his wrist was but biding its time to prey upon it!

For the law itself Maynard felt contempt. He had broken it. But for those simpler laws which went down into the origin of man's being, the laws which proclaimed: "Thou shalt not kill!" He was conscious of intuitive respect. He had never thought much about them. It had never occurred to him that he might one day be brought into conflict with them.

Yet change had placed it in his power to kill just as surely as if his own hand wielded the weapon. If he liberated the thing that tugged suggestively at his wrist, and if the inevitable happened, would he not be equally guilty? Would he not be more guilty? His was the intelligence to foresee. Would not the responsibility be his?

The train was carrying him back to the place from which he had fled. It was reducing at the rate of forty to fifty miles an hour the precious miles between himself and his pursuers. Chance had undone the nearly fatal consequences of his first blunder; was he to blunder a second time?

"No!" breathed Maynard. "No!"

He must accomplish the impossible, the prisoner must be delivered to the authorities and he must make good his own escape.

But it suddenly came to Maynard that his prisoner might be as quick-witted as himself. He glanced into the crazy eyes. The look that he received in return was almost friendly.

As the train slowed down and slithered to a halt at a station Toselli rose nonchalantly, and jerked his head in eloquent suggestion that they alight here. With a violence of which he would have thought himself incapable, Maynard leaped at his prisoner.

Had the man read his thoughts? Here Maynard had hoped the two might leave the train; here, undisturbed by prying eyes, he had hoped to turn the key in the lock. Yet, a single glance through the window at the pretty little cottages, the orderly white street, had told him unmistakably that it was for him to say whether tragedy and death were to be loosed upon the unsuspecting community. Liberty, absence of restraint, the right to come and go as one pleased—what was it all worth if it meant that he could never again take up a newspaper without dread- ing the news it might bring him? From his human pursuers he might make himself secure; but the news of the revolting deed for which he might make himself responsible would pursue him to the very end of the world!

His prisoner sat hunched together at his side, drilling him through with malignant eyes. He had not spoken his mind. Here was bewilderment turned to suspicion, and suspicion turned again to suspicion, and suspicion swollen into soul-scorching, soul-blistering hate.

The momentary struggle between the men had attracted the attention of other passengers. As the train started, an inquisitive traveling salesman rose and came nearer to inspect the prisoner.

"What's he done?" he asked, genially.

"Murder," answered Maynard, shortly. The traveling salesman moved away abruptly.

Maynard, watching out of the corner of his eye, saw him imparting his knowledge to other passengers.

"No, there's no danger," he could hear him saying; "he's got him handcuffed."

Quite unconsciously Maynard squared his shoulders. Maynard, the fugitive from society's justice, became Maynard, the protector of society!

PRESENTLY nervous travelers in groups of two and three, found pretext to wander to his end of the car, there to favor the two men with an impartial scrutiny.

WHEN he had taken their seats in the train, Toselli shook the

city. Now he desired nothing so much as to be relieved of his unwelcome companion at once.

He, Maynard, was a criminal. The law which he had violated proclaimed him one. The other man was a criminal, too, and Maynard became conscious of acute resentment at a classification broad enough to include them both. Alike fugitives from justice they should have had much in common. The thought flitted through Maynard's mind, and left behind it nothing but a sense of revolt. He would have reached for the key of the handcuffs at once had not the station been too crowded.

What had the man done? The papers which he had removed from Guthrie's pockets would tell the story. He leaped through them.

self, of course, but freedom, too, for the monster. Across the aisle unsuspecting passengers were settling themselves comfortably. Humanity! And the thing shackled to his wrist was but biding its time to prey upon it!

For the law itself Maynard felt contempt. He had broken it. But for those simpler laws which went down into the origin of man's being, the laws which proclaimed: "Thou shalt not kill!" He was conscious of intuitive respect. He had never thought much about them. It had never occurred to him that he might one day be brought into conflict with them.

Yet change had placed it in his power to kill just as surely as if his own hand wielded the weapon. If he liberated